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Attitude and Social Representation

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Abstract

In this paper, I compare attitudes and social representations and their relations. Social representation theorists have criticized the attitude theorists for their failure to conceptualize the social nature of attitudes. The Person here is considered as isolated one and apart from his social environment. An exploration about it that the person can affect the nature of the environment and vice versa has not been conducted. Theories of attitudes do not consider the reasons and circumstances of their creation and their relation with social, ideological and historical structure and communication. The European approach of social representation is a mean for socializing these concepts. Social representation focus on community, collective practices and the institutionalization of social knowledge. Moscovici (1981) had offered the social representation to be as a foundation on which attitudes are made. According

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representations lead to attitudes that will be modeled based on a classified system (Rateau, 1999). For a better showing this requires further research and preferably using a qualitative method.

Keywords : Attitudes, Social Representations, Theory architecture of social thought.

Attitude is one of the important and fundamental concepts in the social psychology. We use this concept to answer the various attitudinal things such as individuals, social groups and position and social issues. They are seen as relatively fixed and stable over time and context (Hogg & Vaughan, 2002). Allport (1935) claimed that the concept of attitude is probably the most distinctive and indispensable concept and an important research area in American social psychology. Attitudes are versions of the world that are constructed by people in the course of their interactions with others. The attitude approach mainly focuses on the individual's response to a particular object or situation (Howarth, Foster and Dorrer, 2004; Jodelet, 1991). In addition, they are considered to be an evaluation of people, objects and ideas.

Attitude and Social Representation

At one point in the history of this field what was as an attitude, was very similar to what we call today the social representation. Thomas and Znaniecki studies (1918-1920) are as a basic and essential example about attitudes that can be now in accordance with social representation. Furthermore, the theory of reasoned action by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), which investigates the social norms (see social norms as a version of social representations). Laljee and et al. (1984) define attitudes as communicative acts that infer favorable or unfavorable evaluations about a class of objects, individuals or events. Since that time however, the way that we use the term of attitudes in the social psychology has changed and these concepts are incompatible with one another.

Social representations

The European approach of social representations with the focus on the community, collective action and the institutionalization of social knowledge (Jodelet, 1991) have often been compared with the American concept of attitudes associated with discourses of individualism and subjective evaluation. Historically, in 1858-1917, Emile Durkheim imposes in sociology the notion of “collective representation”. Moscovici (1961) transformed the collective representations of Durkheim into the social representations, by passing them of sociology to the social psychology. Moscovici (1961) buttresses the idea that the individual does not conceive social objects neither from an objective reality nor in an individual way. He reacts to those objects on the base of a collectively and socially constructed reality. Instead of a monolithic representation which comes, according to Durkheim, from a collective and trans-generational consciousness which characterizes the society, Moscovici puts forward the idea of a contextualized representation, constructed through inter-individual interactions. Such representation permits to the social actor to get adapted to the reality of the moment. This reality brings aptly about the definition of the groups who build it. Moscovici (1963) defined social representations as a multifaceted concept focusing on systems of values, ideas, images and practices. Social representation is conceived as a cognitive but at the same time social process. It is hence sociocognitive by nature. Social representations are constructed from everyday experience and communications (informal, in the media...). They determine how to interact and conduct. Thus, they intervene as a circular system where practice and representations influence mutually each other (Abric, 1994). Social representation involves between the socio-cultural, inter-subjectivity and the psychological organisation of knowledge and emphasises that moves towards an active understanding of representations. Social representations concern the contents of everyday thinking that give coherence to our beliefs, ideas, and connections we create ‘as easily as we breathe’ (Moscovici, 1998, p. 214).

Moscovici (1973) sought to investigate how scientific theories circulate within common sense, and what happens to these theories when they are elaborated upon by a lay public. For such analysis, Moscovici postulated two universes: the reified universe of science, which operates according to scientific rules and procedures and gives rise to scientific knowledge, and the consensual universe of social representation, in which the lay public elaborates and circulates forms of knowledge which come to constitute the content of common sense.

As introduced by Moscovici (1961), Social representation plays a double function: on one hand, it establishes an order in the environment allowing thus the individual to control it and to get one’s bearings in there. On the other hand, it makes the communication easier since it offers, to the group members, social categories and common codes to designate and rank objects.

Social representations develop from the integration of new cognitive elements into existing representations by means of objectification and anchoring. Firstly, anchoring is the process which new knowledge, ideas and opinions are proven by a social group if they fit to an already existing categorisation scheme. If the new information fit, they are integrated into the already existing social representation and the existing social representation will be reshaped. On the other hand, a new social representation develops when the new information about an unfamiliar object does not fit into the categorisation scheme because of too many new and with existing elements conflicting information as second process, objectification refers to the process by which abstract ideas or concepts become concrete. Anchoring and objectification are interwoven processes, which proceed rather simultaneously than in a sequential order (Abric, 1994; Moscovici, 1984).

Social representation designates simultaneously a structure and a process. Social Representations Theory stipulates that the subject and the object are not separated. The first participates to the construction of the latter in function of social insertions (Moscovici, 1973). Therefore, the object is not constructed according to its objective characteristics but according to the characteristics of the social individuals who appropriate the object through the communication processes that they develop around it. Groups are then defined on the base of the community of their representations. Social representations and attitude are compatible entities. Social representations exist outside the individual as well as in the mind of the individual. Social representations emerge as the product of values, ideas and practices while individuals are trying to make sense of their physical and social environment. (Moscovici, 1984).

Social representations are particularly appropriate when the topic of study involves multiple social perspectives, provides challenges, difficulties and conflicts due to a change, and features the communication of ideas in the public arena. Social representations are cognitive schemas (or one form of knowledge, socially formed and shared among a

group of people) which allows us to think based on them and the reality is represent for us. Social representations constitute a form of knowledge, socially worked out and shared, having a practical and convergent aim in building a common reality which is used for a social group. Furthermore, this knowledge is due to a common sense or simple, naïve and natural knowledge that is differentiated of scientific knowledge (Jodelet, 1989).

In this definition knowledge is ensemble of cognition (opinions, beliefs, attitudes, values.....). It is elaborated by communication, by experience, in reference to the norms. This knowledge including the naïf, natural and simple words and a common sense, often is opposed to scientific knowledge. Here, between the scientific discourses and knowledge of ordinary people, there are usually differences. Studies relating to social representations show that events of daily life tend to be interpreted based on the fact that the individual or the group has already reconstructed and the new experiments are accommodated and in accordance with the social existing representations (Pourtois & Desmet, 1989). These representations no conscientisees are named implicit theories in the works of Anglo-Saxon. Nevertheless the implicit theories of the personality which influenced by social factors are not taken (Vandenplas-Holper, 1987).

Social representations were created following a gradual decrease in behaviourism and cognitivism. The behaviorists analyse behaviors according to the characteristics of situation (Stimulus -Answer) and there is an absence of taking into account of mental phenomena. The cognitivists analyses human behaviors according to interpretations that the man makes of his social environment (Stimulus- Organism - Answer). The theory of social representations analyses human behaviors according to the manner that the individual interprets and constructs his social environment (Organism-Stimulus-organism-Response). Representations will not be constructed in insulation by individual. They are formed during interactions and talk with the others and then anchored in our tradition and ideologies (Moscovici, 1998). Social representations are simply found in the minds of individualis, but are also evident in the world (Moscovici, 1988), in social action, (Bradbury, 1991), public health (Joffe, 2002), cultural institutions (Howarth, 2004), religious practices (Fraser, 1994), (in Howarth, 2006). Moscovici, (1981, 1984) had offered to consider social representations to be foundations on which attitudes are made.

Social representations can be considered to be social because it is shared by many individuals. It therefore creates a social reality which can influence individual behaviour. Social representations theory is also seen as a way of re-socialising psychological views as it brings into focus the role of history, ideology and communication within the psychological domain (Moscovici, 1972; Oktar, 2001).

Theory of the social thought architecture

Social representations have to do with the interactive dynamic relationships between social knowledge, common identities and social practices. (Howarth, Foster & Dorrer, 2004). An attitude is an expression of a social representation (Howarte 2006, Hogg & Vaughan, 2002). Social representations play an encompassing role towards the social thought. In fact, they constitute “a fundamental category of sociability” (Rouquette & Rateau, 1998, p.14). In the social thought architecture (Rouquette, 1996), social representations refer to cognitive formation between, on one hand, attitudes and opinion which are in an organization and stability level and, on the other hand, ideology which is located in a superior level (Flament & Rouquette, 2003).

The "architecture of social thinking", a model presented by Rouquette (1996) suggests that various forms of social thought may be conceived as being part of a hierarchical organization. Differentiation at the upper level of the architecture proposed by Rouquette would engender effects cascading down to the lower levels, passing through every stage: ideological, representational, and attitudinal/opinion related.

Rouquette (1996) suggested an architecture of social thought, where certain forms of this type of thought are organized into a classification depending on their stability (or intra- and inter-individual variability) and their degree of the possibility (or their level of integration). Any real or imagined object is perceived, represented and understood according to our social reference framework. This framework is intrinsically linked to the groups that we belong to them.

Ideologies-----social representations-----Attitudes-----Opinions.

Ideology as a form of social thought, would then contribute towards people's shaping of their social construction of the world. It would be one of the required keys for the people's interpretation of the situation when faced with an

object or event. Within the architecture of social thought, ideology comes into the highest level. Deonchy (1989), Flament, & Rouquette (2003), Ibanez (1991), Rouquette (1996), VanDijk (1998) have expressed that ideology is causing to the social representations. Ideology itself is immediate and will organize social representations and the social representations in turn will organize the attitudes.

The reasons for being of an attitude or a set of attitudes are the social representations. For example, condemning communist or refusing psychoanalysis during the 50th decades (Moscovi, 1961) were due to the negative attitudes towards theory and related methods from the social representation in connection with these things. Moliner and Tafari (1997) showed, in fact, that a change of attitudes towards the objects had no consequence on the level of representations. However, the architecture of social thought is not the only attempt at linking together these three notions (attitudes, representations and ideology). Doise (1982) suggested that they refer to different levels of analysis, the social representations are a subsystem ensuing from the ideological system. Attitudes that being more individual, therefore entails an inter- or intrapersonal level. Râteau (2000) suggested that, "this perspective implicitly presupposes the existence of a hierarchical system in which ideology is above and attitudes are below social representations". Wolter and his colleague's studies (2009) showed that both groups (non-religious and catholic) with different ideologies had different attitudes. This would indicate that the upper level of the architecture of social thought (the ideological level) would have an effect on the lower level of the architecture (attitudinal level). Based on the structure of social thought, this relationship is not direct and the representations are located between them (Gurrieri, 2007).

Conclusion

As a conclusion with regard to the above mentioned, there is the relation between the self and his or her own society. Individual thought processes and social reality must be understood as mutually interdependent, constitutive and transformative. The individual is a product of her/his social environment, and produces that environment in constantly changing and dynamic ways (Meads, 1972) (Howarth, 2006). The organism and the environment operating in a system of mutual influences by which the parts all determine each other's characteristics and functions. There is no pure individuality which can be apprehended independently of social relations. The social representations have influenced the attitudes.

Also, we can intuit variation in the ideology produces variations at every level of the architecture of social thought. Such a domino effect would therefore be in some way due to an intervening link between the various levels of social thought, ensuing from a variation at the first ideological level (Wolter & et al, 2009). According to the social thought architecture, the representational level would coordinate attitudes (Vergès, 1994). Social representations theories focus on the intersubjective nature of representation and the simultaneously collective/historical and individual/subjective nature of our interactions and communication. These findings don't allow us to establish a causal relationship among these different levels. However, architecture of the social thought that can effectively be a general descriptive framework attitudinally for phenomena, and related to the social thought that ideologically exists in us. We must conceive social reality with to take account different levels of social thought, with how they are linked up. These findings lead us to think that to conceive social reality, it seems necessary to take into account different levels of social thought, with how they are linked up. The continuance of these researches will be able to make and to open the way to new focusing research on the relationship between these levels and forms of social thought.

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